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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*Assessment of the Situation  
in the Southern Delta of South Vietnam*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
19 April 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Assessment of the Situation  
in the Southern Delta of South Vietnam

Summary

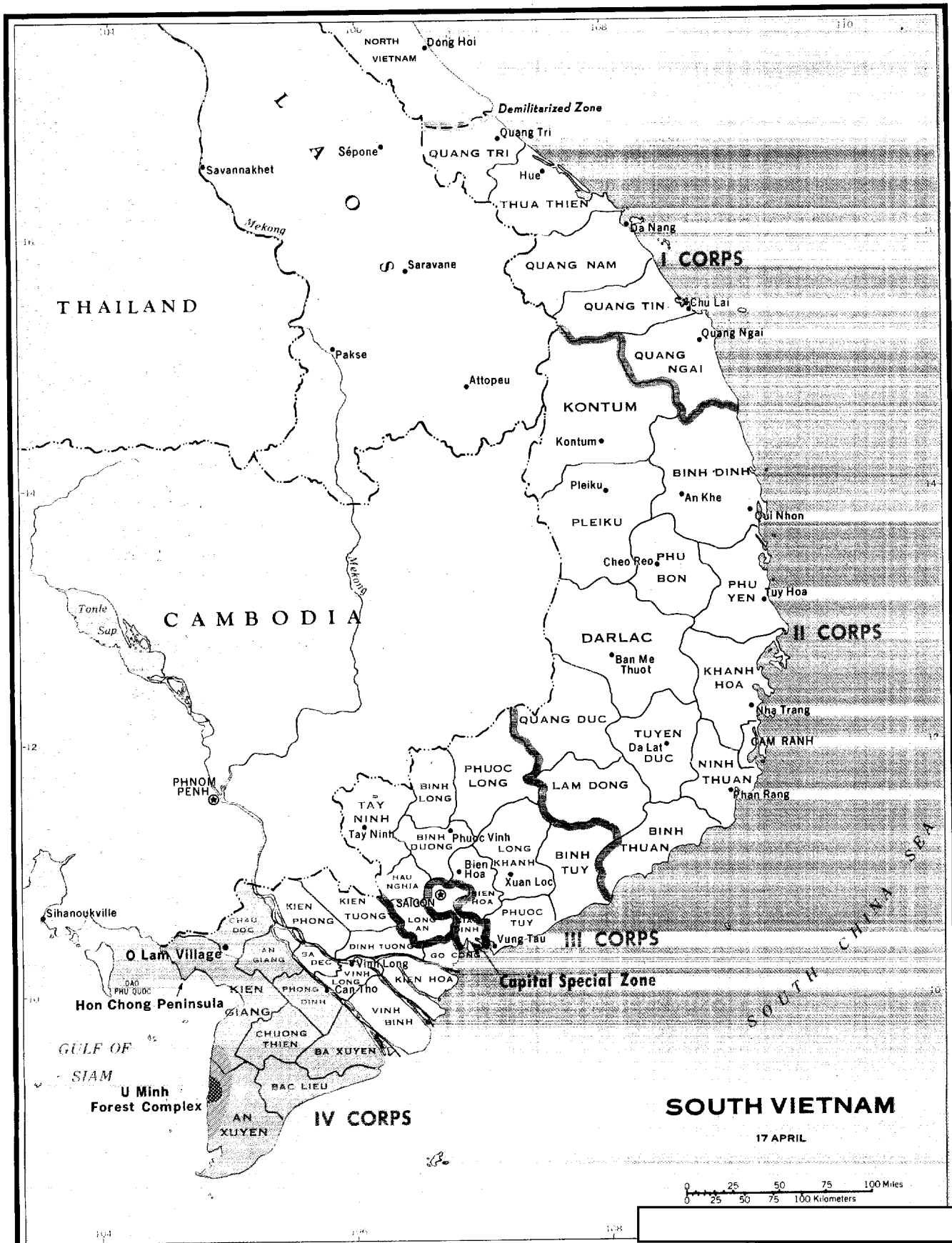
Recent US intelligence assessments from the southern Mekong Delta provinces conclude generally that the Viet Cong have lost their momentum in this area and are now conducting what is essentially a "holding operation." At the same time, these reports warn that there has been little positive progress on the government side. Despite some ambitious plans for Revolutionary Development, the situation in the southern delta at present appears to be virtually stalemated.

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### Viet Cong Status

1. The Communist loss of momentum in the southern delta provinces--including An Giang, An Xuyen, Ba Xuyen, Bac Lieu, Chau Doc, Chuong Thien, Kien Giang and Phong Dinh--has been caused to a considerable extent by the presence of US and other allied forces north of Saigon during the past year and a half (see map). To try to "balance" and counter this presence, Viet Cong troops, including guerrillas, were drawn out of the delta, causing a decline in their strength in the far south. Another major factor contributing to the present static nature of the war in the delta is the vulnerability of the Communists in this area to US air operations. The open terrain, which characterizes most of the delta, makes it difficult to conceal large conventional combat units. Viet Cong attacks of battalion size and larger declined sharply after US tactical jet aircraft were introduced in early 1965. In this context, tactical air support has given ARVN forces in the delta a great advantage in engagements with the enemy.

2. Consequently, the Viet Cong have apparently been forced to maintain only a low tempo of operations in the southern delta provinces. They have launched a few company- and battalion-size attacks in recent months, and have mounted mortar attacks against government outposts and several district towns. Current tactics for the most part, however, consist of such harassments as sniping, mining of roads, and setting booby traps. According to the various provincial assessments, these actions have been sufficient to keep the populace well aware of the VC presence and to prevent any significant government gains.

### GVN Pacification Efforts

3. On the government side, the tempo of operations has been correspondingly low. Many South Vietnamese Government officials in the lower delta are considered by US observers apathetic, inefficient, and corrupt. The Revolutionary Development program in most of these provinces has started poorly, and there has been little genuine interest in the present round of village elections, except on the part of those officials ordered to be concerned.

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4. In nearly all of the southern delta provinces, US officials characterize the prevailing attitude among the general population as one of political apathy, with the primary desire being for personal physical security. This frame of mind has made it difficult for GVN officials to mobilize the people for effective action. The average peasant exhibits respect for the government only when the South Vietnamese Army increases its operations and shows force in an area.

5. In many instances, GVN provincial officials apparently tolerate known Communist elements often because VC economic activities dovetail with their own. This is particularly apparent in Chau Doc Province where, according to a US provincial representative, a great deal of revenue comes from the smuggling trade to and from Cambodia, and where both GVN and Viet Cong officials are heavily involved in the profits from this trade.

6. US sources report that, in many parts of the lower delta, there appears to be tacit agreement between the South Vietnamese Government and the Viet Cong to maintain the status quo. Both the ARVN and the Viet Cong have maintained "safe" areas for many years and neither side has shown a strong desire to disturb this arrangement in recent months.

7. In the southern delta, the main VC stronghold is the U Minh Forest complex in Kien Giang and An Xuyen provinces. Another important base is in the Co To mountain region near O Lam village in Chau Doc Province. The U Minh complex has remained essentially untouched since the early 1950s despite sporadic ARVN forays into the area. There is no permanent GVN presence in O Lam village, one of the richest rice-producing and cattle-raising areas of Chau Doc Province. GVN forces rarely dare to enter this area.

8. A change in the status quo did occur recently when, after many weeks of vacillation, ARVN troops moved into the Hon Chong peninsula in Kien Giang Province. This was not accomplished without

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rumors of a Viet Cong/GVN "accommodation." This rich and productive area had formerly been under firm Communist control. Now the Communist control is not overt, but US intelligence officers think it is quite probable that peasants in areas such as this still pay taxes to the clandestine Viet Cong infrastructure.

### Prospects

9. Many of the reporting officers comment that the Viet Cong are expecting a sizable number of US troops to enter the delta and that some reactions are already evident. In several areas the Communists are building up their main force battalions, suggesting an intention to meet the US forces head on. At the same time, they are reportedly storing caches of food and arms in various locations to support an increased emphasis on guerrilla activity.

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